

REFLECTIONS ON MEDICAL ETHICS

"Since nation-wide publicity, reaching to every obscure crossroads newspaper in the land, has been given to a speech delivered a few days ago by that otherwise useful man, Royal S. Copeland, reflecting on Medical Ethics, it is time for the profession to take notice. . . . When a man like Copeland gives voice to such statements as 'the Code of Medical Ethics is the most antiquated, moss covered germ laden institution in the world' . . . by his own language convicts himself of what it is charity to ascribe to simple ignorance on the part of its author. . . .

"No! the most emphatic tenets of medical ethics have always been to gladly and freely hand to humanity whatever has been discovered for the alleviation or cure of diseases and to condemn, as despicable quacks, all 'who make a secret of cures.' . . .

"Heritages from the wise, as well as the written evidences of lofty ideals from our profession, who during the ages have held aloft the Caduceus of Hermes, are sometimes overlooked in the cares and drudgery of professional life. Some, therefore, are to be found with heads more or less burdened with scientific acumen who show unpardonable ignorance of their duty to the community and to the profession to which they belong. Such one-sided tendencies can but be deplored. . . .

"The lamented Dr. Osler said in reference to the public: 'There is a delightful Arabian proverb, two lines of which run: "He that knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool—shun him. He that knows not and knows that he knows not is simple—teach him." It is our province to have to deal with the extremes of civic life. We must fight the wilful ignorance of the other. Not with the sword of righteous indignation, but with the skilful weapon of the tongue. On this ignorance the charlatan and the quack live.' . . . It is unprofessional and ignoble to fail to defend the reputation of an absent brother when justice demands it—well has it been observed: 'He who degrades a colleague degrades his art.'

"In changing from one physician to another it is common for patients to attempt to justify their course by speaking ill of the former physician. No physician should permit such criticism.

"The porcupine attitude towards other physicians and petty quibbling only furnish material for jocose remarks from the public and add nothing to a vocation which holds a sacred trust. . . . Disparaging allusion to the ignorance of the past does not commend one, for the world knows centuries were required to produce one Hypocrates, a Jenner, a Pasteur and a Sims, not to mention a few great now living, and that the vaunted perfections of today will be viewed by the medicine of the future much as we contemplate prehistoric man's stone ax. . . . From the physician the public has a right to exact efficiency in diagnosis, treatment, and prophylaxis. To meet these requirements every available aid must be invoked to properly interpret the intricate symptoms at times encountered, not forgetting that abstract science is nothing unless it be the handmaiden to an analytical mind, common sense and sound judgment. . . . The crucial test for all conduct—the one law, which, regardless of creed or religion, all philosophers and prophets acknowledge as paramount in determining and governing human relationships from a social or economical viewpoint—is the Golden Rule. Make it the standard of measurement for every act; the court of last resort—the final tribunal for every doubtful position, and error will not occur."—Furman, *Southern Medicine and Surgery*, June, 1922.

GENIUS AT BAY

"If genius is a neurosis, as has been plausibly argued, then some interesting questions may be postulated in the light of new knowledge in the psychological sphere.

"Hitherto, the genius either did not know that there was anything the matter with him, or if he suspected that there was he had no idea as to its nature. Other people said that his gifts were from God—or from the devil. But nowadays we account for him with equal glibness, in another way; we say that he is a neurotic, and we furnish him with a set of Freudian complexes that would put an Oedipus to shame.

"Now we don't believe that geniuses of an older day tried to understand themselves; they just pegged away at their marvelous creations and made the most of life without inquiring too closely into the reasons why of their unconventional activities; and it wouldn't have done them any good if they had, for men had not then gone beyond God and the devil in their thinking; Freud was born late, and our ancient geniuses were deprived, as it were, of his services.

"The point to which we are leading up is this: The genius of today can hardly escape 'contamination' by the Freudian lore which drips from everybody's tongue and pen. Will it not prove to be a tanglefoot influence? When your genius becomes self-conscious and censorious about his mechanisms will he not cease to be an honest-to-goodness genius? How can a potential Shelley, wrastlin' with something on the Skylark order, forget his complexes long enough to turn out an ode of immortal quality? Let us suppose that he starts in with an inspired line or two comparable to those with which Keats begins the Grecian Urn; at that point Keats was no longer a man, but a veritable god; at that same point our present-day genius will realize that it is only some darned homosexual complex that is attempting to order his fancies and he will not be able to capitulate to it quite completely enough to give us another Grecian Urn?

"That is the point. How can there ever be another Grecian Urn?

"This Freudian stuff defeats that which it attempts to elucidate. It is a Frankenstein. It hampers the divine fermentation that begets great art.

"Suppose that Leonardo da Vinci had understood that his mother-love complex was at the bottom of all his extraordinary mechanisms, and suppose that he had realized all the morbidity and abnormality of his obsession—is it likely that he would have yielded to it so completely as to achieve all that we know as the product of his brain and hand? Do not such things depend, after all, upon one's sublime unconsciousness of the workings of creative mechanisms?

"Truly our civilization seems to carry within itself all the germs making for its own destruction.

"Today we understand the reasons for everything—which may be why we are at such a standstill in the world of art.

"It would require a genius to show us the way out of such a dilemma. How can the *reductio ad absurdum* be escaped?"—(*New York Medical Journal*, July, 1922.)

Sheppard-Towner Act Rejected—The Legislatures of Massachusetts and New York and Rhode Island have recently rejected Federal aid as offered through the provisions of the Sheppard-Towner act. New York has appropriated \$130,000 for "protection of the health of mothers, infants and children" to be expended by their own Board of Health.